

101 If the Bushmen, whose relationship to the Pygmies is highly questionable, be left aside, there are three main groups of African Pygmies—the Mbuti of the Ituri Forest, the Tswa of the western Congo and western Africa, and the Twa between Lake Kivu and Lake Tanganyika. Of these, only the first group is truly “Pygmy” according to Schebesta (1952), being under 150 cm. in stature and relatively free from intermixture with neighboring tribes. Schebesta refers to the Twa and Tswa as “Pygmoids.” From all the available evidence [184] it seems that the Ituri Mbuti alone preserve any semblance of their original nomadic life as hunters and gatherers, although little is known yet about the Pygmies of equatorial Africa.

175 Our earliest sources (the Sixth-Dynasty tomb
131 at Beni Hassan, the Pompeian parietal paintings, Homer, Aristotle, and even the Mappa Mundi) all agree in placing a Pygmy population near the source of the Nile. Later sources enlarge little on this information, and the first real attempt to delimit the territory was made by Schebesta in 1929-1930.

131 The Ituri Mbuti inhabit the forested basins of the Lindi and Ituri rivers (Schebesta). The Bomokandi River forms the northern frontier. The Mbuti never move beyond the edge of the
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THE FOREST PEOPLE

182 the forest for many thousands of years. It is their world, and in return for their affection and trust it supplies them with all their needs.

182 They do not have to cut the forest down to build plantations, for
824 they know how to hunt the game of the region and gather the wild
825 fruits that grow in abundance there, though hidden to outsiders. They know how to distinguish the innocent-looking *itaba* vine from the many others it resembles so closely, and they know how to follow it until it leads them to a cache of nutritious, sweet-tasting roots.

[821] They know the tiny sounds that tell where the bees have hidden their honey; they recognize the kind of weather that brings a multitude of different kinds of mushrooms springing to the surface; and they know what kinds of wood and leaves often disguise this food. The exact moment when termites swarm, at which they must be caught to provide an important delicacy, is a mystery to any but the people of the forest. They know the secret language that is denied all outsiders and without which life in the forest is an impossibility.

181 The BaMbuti roam the forest at will, in small isolated bands or hunting groups. They have no fear, because for them there is no danger. For them there is little hardship, so they have no need for belief in evil spirits. For them it is a good world. The fact that they

• [141] average less than four and a half feet in height is of no concern to them; their taller neighbors, who jeer at them for being so puny, are as clumsy as elephants—another reason why they must always remain outsiders in a world where your life may depend on your ability to run swiftly and silently. And if the Pygmies are small, they are powerful and tough.

174 How long they have lived in the forest we do not know, though it is a considered opinion that they are among the oldest inhabitants of Africa. They may well be the original inhabitants of the great tropical rain forest which stretches nearly from coast to coast. They were certainly well established there at the very beginning of historic times.

THE GIVER OF THE LAW

his head he stalked back to the main camp shouting at the top of his voice what miserable wretches his brother and his sister-in-law were. The dirty old pipe was damning evidence, and all sympathy was with Masalito. Njobo's wife took her husband's pipestem and gave it to Masalito, who quickly regained his good humor. But by now Aberi was aroused, and came storming into the camp, saying that his brother had insulted Tamasa. He declared that it was a matter for serious action; Masalito should be thrashed.

Everybody thought this was a great joke, and burst into laughter. Only children and youths get thrashed, and Masalito was a father. Aberi did not like being laughed at and he went over to where Masalito was sitting down on a log, smoking his new pipe. He demanded an apology. Masalito, now completely composed, simply picked up the old pipestem and threw it at his brother's feet, saying, "There! That is for her!" By now a crowd had gathered around, and the hotter Aberi became the more relaxed Masalito seemed to be.

Aberi shook his fists and said that if nobody else was going to thrash Masalito he was. This brought more laughs as Aberi was positively puny beside Masalito, who himself was little more than four feet tall. Masalito invited his brother to come and try. Aberi then pretended that he was holding a spear, and in a high-pitched voice, squeaking with anger, he cried out, "I am going to get my spear and I am going to kill you completely!" Whereupon he imitated a spear thrust in Masalito's direction. There was a gasp of horror, as this is something one does not say to one's brother even in jest. But Masalito replied calmly, "Go and get your spear, then, and come back and kill me. I'll still be here. You don't have the courage to kill your brother." He said a lot of other things, goading Aberi on to an even higher pitch of fury. Aberi tried to make himself more impressive by a graphic dance, which was meant to show exactly how he was going to leap in the air and twist around and drive the spear home. But he

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